

BOOKS ABOUT TATTOOING

Recent years have seen a surprising number of new books on tattooing in the Pacific as well as several re-prints of long out-of-print works on the subject. **Tricia Allen**, tattooist and author of *Tattoo Traditions of Polynesia*, provided the following list:

Tattoo: An Anthropology by Makiko Kuwahara. Although the title gives no indication, Kuwahara's book is entirely dedicated to tattooing in French Polynesia — primarily Tahiti. During several trips to French Polynesia, Kuwahara spent a good deal of time with the tattoo community, which is reflected in her work. Her portrayals of many of the individuals, however realistic, are not always complimentary, a fact of which most are unaware. While Kuwahara's interviews and accounts of interactions with tattooists are light, enjoyable reading, her summary of the historical practice, her methodology and discussion of the social context is quite academic, leading some to criticize it as disjointed. However I did not find this to be the case.



Berg, 2005 (ISBN 978-1-8452-0155-5); 268 pages.

Mau Moko: The World of Maori Tattoo by Te Awakotuku Ngahuaia, with Linda Waimarie Nikora. *Mau Moko* is beautifully designed and features gorgeous color reproductions of both historical material and contemporary photos. It is definitely the most lavish and comprehensive work yet on Maori tattooing. My only criticism is that the tattooists are not credited in the captions for photographs of the contemporary art.

University of Hawai'i Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-8248-3253-7); 259 pages.

Tattooing the World: Pacific Designs in Print and Skin by Juniper Ellis, professor of English at Loyola College, Maryland. Ellis explores traditional Pacific tattoo patterns and their meanings for Pacific cultures, identifying their origins and the significance of modern tattoo within a vast literature. Ellis's work is thorough and well-rooted in the early literature — the only error I found was minor (the term given for Marquesan tattooing is *tiki*, rather than *patu tiki*, meaning “to strike an

image”, or *patiki*, which is more commonly used today). Ellis also cites Gell's work numerous times, which, perhaps due to his medical condition at the time of his writing, is not accurate in its entirety. Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed Ellis's book and highly recommend it.

Colombia University Press, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-2311-4368-4); 304 pages.

Tattooing in the Marquesas, by Willowdean Chatterson Handy, is finally back in print. As a member of the Bayard Dominick Expedition to the Marquesas in 1920-21, Handy's intention was to document string figures and other women's arts. While in the islands, she found herself intrigued with the tattoos worn by the few remaining elders, and sought to locate, photograph, and interview others. Handy's work documents the art worn by approximately 125 individuals, many of whom she painted to add contrast to their designs, and photograph. Handy attempted a geographic analysis of the art, theorizing that in the northern Marquesas emphasis was on the ability to endure pain as she witnessed bolder, blacker patterns on those encountered on Nuku Hiva and Ua Pou. This was her short-coming; would distinct geographic styles still be visible 50 years after the demise of the art, which, by the way, were more strictly enforced on Nuku Hiva? Regardless, Handy's work is an invaluable source of images of tattoo styles prevalent in the late nineteenth century.

Reprint by Dover Publications, 2008 (ISBN 978-0-4864-6612-5); 80 pages.

Tattooing in the Marshall Islands by Dirk H.R. Spennemann. In this book,

Spennemann provides a comprehensive overview on traditional tattooing in the Marshall Islands.

Drawing on a wide range of sources, he documents the nature and history of individual tattoo motifs and their combinations and places them into a cultural context. It is an excellent work, first published in 1992 by the Marshall Islands Historic Preservation Office under the name *Marshallese Tattoos* but now available in a revised edition.

Bess Press, 2009 (ISBN: 978-1-5730-6289-7); 216 pages.

